



*Office of Public Affairs  
U.S. Embassy, Wellington*

Address by U.S. Ambassador Charles J. Swindells

4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration  
Wellington, New Zealand  
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### **SILENCING THE ECHOES OF THE PAST**

Thank you, and welcome to our celebration of the 229<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is a day of celebration and it is a privilege and honor to be able to share it with everyone here today. This is my last 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration as the United States Ambassador to New Zealand. Caroline and I will soon depart these fair shores and return to our home state of Oregon. Oregon is not unlike New Zealand in many respects. But similar is not the same and we both will miss this wonderful country.

Our time here has revealed to us a great many unforgettable things about New Zealand. The warmth, the decency and generosity of its people. The majesty of its countryside. The vitality of its culture. And its collective passion for prevailing over any Australian sports team. In short, we're hooked, and we plan to return here as often as we can.

This day is very special for my country. It allows Americans of all racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds to celebrate what you might call the ultimate fresh start: the birth of our nation. On this day, we reflect upon and honor the diversities of the American people, and marvel that a people so varied have become one nation. Our national motto clearly states: From many, one. Each one with an individual voice, a shared heritage, and a common future. That was the vision of our founding fathers. Their vision was a reaction to a changing world, but it changed the world, too.

It seems so inevitable now, but really it wasn't – after all it was a revolution. But although the founding father's vision was not always shared by others it was able to quickly prove its worth.

America has had some trying times, but, thankfully, we've had visionaries who provided leadership during those times. One was the late Robert Kennedy, who I campaigned for when he ran for President in 1968. Robert Kennedy said "some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not."

Robert Kennedy shared with America's founding fathers the belief that if we do not have vision we can get mired in the past. We can even become resistant to change and fail to react as the times demand. This is a powerful message, and one that resonates as much today as it did in 1776 or 1968.

With this in mind, I would like to take this final opportunity to present some personal observations about the New Zealand-United States relationship and my vision for that relationship.

As I have often said, it is easy to overlook the fact that New Zealand and the United States are related in many, many respects. In a way we are like family. We share common elements of history and culture. We are both young countries with a stoic and worthy commitment to democratic principles and the rights of man. Both countries continue to share the liberal values of freedom and peace, justice and human rights. We have a common goal of a world that is stable, peaceful, prosperous and democratic.

Now over my four years here I have also come to see that in some ways we are very different. It's not just the noticeable things -- geography, accents, or the way New Zealanders insist --wrongly, I believe -- that Vegemite on toast makes a tasty breakfast. The way we look at the world today and our roles within that world can be very different. How each country looks at our dispute of 20 years ago -- what caused it, what the remaining implications are -- can be very different. I think if we are honest with ourselves we would admit that those differences remain. This doesn't negate the fact that in many ways we are close, nor that we cooperate closely in many ways, both here and around the world. And the bonds between our peoples are even greater than those between our governments.

Actually, I believe that it's because we are so close -- in history, in language, in values -- that in an attempt to preserve our friendship, we tend to want to gloss over our differences. Or if we do acknowledge differences we insist they are the product of certain Administrations or politicians. Let's face it, family differences are the hardest to face up to.

So the question is: what are these differences? Are they inevitable because of different ways of viewing the world, or are they a product of a single split in policy that happened twenty years ago? Can we bring ourselves closer, or will we continue to drift ever further apart?

Believe me, I have thought over these questions long and hard over the past four years. And I confess that I do not have the answers. But I do have a *suggestion*-- We need to talk about it.

Successive governments in both countries have been unwilling or unable to deal comprehensively with the strains that have accumulated in the bilateral relationship since the mid-eighties.

Let me be clear. I don't think that departures in global interests or differences in political, economic and defense policies will ever force the U.S.-New Zealand relationship to an end. Neither does my government. The United States not only expects differences, we respect differences. Such is the nature of democracy and our respect for national sovereignty. I strongly suspect that New Zealanders feel the same way.

But a key pillar of a mature and trusting relationship is honest and open dialogue. The past 20 years have witnessed, unfortunately, a somewhat stifled dialogue. We keep disagreeing about the past. But the world moves on and we need to move with it.

A lack of dialogue, in any relationship, creates mistrust. That kind of mistrust continues to affect a range of aspects of the bilateral relationship and not just military cooperation. Values and interests change with the times. However, principles of trust and respect should not change. Ever. If they do then we risk losing for good the bond that both countries have worked so hard to forge.

Past grievances should not deter full and frank discussion between friends about areas of mutual interest, of which there are many, and areas of disagreement, of which some still exist. The foundation stone of any friendship is surely the willingness to move beyond past grievances and to see things as they are now, without echoes of past difficulties impeding progress.

Some favor the status quo, and that's their choice. But in my view, there's really no such thing. It's like treading water in a strong current- if you don't take decisive action you may unintentionally end up in a place not to your liking. Relationships are slowly but surely swept away when they are backward looking and starved of trust, open dialogue and mutual respect. Relationships are dynamic. If they are not changing to meet new challenges they lose relevance. The United States does not want this to happen to our bilateral relationship.

It needn't happen if both countries open the door to *comprehensive* dialogue about the issues that have adversely affected the relationship over the last 20 years. We cannot do this by working around the edges.

I don't think I'm alone in wanting this comprehensive discussion to happen. During my time here, I have spoken with New Zealanders far and wide about the bilateral relationship. This is to be expected when one becomes the United States Ambassador to this land. What I did not expect was a seemingly growing appetite by many to rejuvenate the relationship by reviewing, or at the very least, discussing, the issues that divide us.

From my conversations, it appears clear to me that many New Zealanders:

1. Believe that our bilateral relationship is important to both countries;

2. Are frustrated that successive governments, in both countries, have let the relationship drift to a point where it does not fulfill its potential; and
3. Realize that until there is a frank and open discussion on the issues that divide us, we will continue to drift. Nothing will change and the potential will remain unrealized.

When the United States talks about what the relationship could be if we go forward, we do not seek to turn back time. We fully realize that the New Zealand foreign policy approach of today is different from what it was in ANZUS days. So is our own. More to the point, *the world* has changed. We need to talk --fully and openly -- about what kind of bilateral relationship makes sense today. That, after all, is what friends do. Even if the discussion does not resolve the differences that we have, it would surely go a long way to help reestablish the trust that eroded 20 years ago.

Although much can be learned from history, the present day can also provide valuable lessons. Forty years ago, the United States and communist Vietnam were mired in a bloody and violent war that divided the two countries and claimed the lives of many thousands on both sides. Yet as a result of comprehensive dialogue, the two countries now cooperate on a wide variety of issues including security, economic and cultural initiatives. Just two weeks ago President Bush opened the Oval Office to the highest-ranking official from Vietnam since the conflict ended in 1975. This shift in the relationship between two nations, who not so long ago were bitter enemies, is a historic transition. It serves to remind us that even after the most extreme divergence that two countries can possibly have, there comes a time when the echoes of the past need to be silenced.

I find no better illustration of this than how Senator John McCain, a former prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, introduced the Vietnamese Prime Minister by saying "thirty years after the war's end, I believe we should look to the future and its potential and not to the past and its pain." Having visited Vietnam last year, I can personally attest that a great number of Vietnamese agree with this sentiment.

The scale of the divergence between New Zealand and the United States obviously never reached anything near the level of our conflict with Vietnam.

However the improved relations between the United States and Vietnam remind us to see things as they are today, and not as they once were. It shows what's possible when two countries work together to address the most difficult of issues and stop working around the edges.

New Zealand and the United States are two countries most dear to my heart. I care deeply about the bond between the two. I will continue to care deeply long after I depart my post.

I believe that the relationship is good- but it could be so much better.

Let us take this opportunity to move forward together. Let us take time to talk freely and honestly. Let us, as America's founders did so long ago and as the first New Zealand settlers did so long ago-- seize the moment to define ourselves- not as what we were, but as what we can be.

Today is a day of celebration. And as much as I do not want my remarks to be diminished, I want to emphasize the most important reason we all here and that is-- to celebrate.

So let us raise out glasses and toast to the future of the relationship and to the Queen.